

I Got You, Shipmate!



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I recently observed two shipmates performing maintenance on retractable flight-deck nets while the ship was pierside. Their work involved attaching lanyards to clips that keep the safety-net supports in place. First, neither Sailor was wearing a safety harness. Second, a petty officer second class and the supervisor were holding the belt loops of a petty officer third class, two-thirds of whose body was under and outside the safety net on the ship's pier side.

I told the ship's OOD about the unsafe practices, and he immediately stopped the work. When questioned, the three Sailors said they took the safety shortcuts because—in their estimation—it would have taken too long to get permission to work over the side and have to put on safety harnesses, all for only 10 minutes of work. The OOD gave them some safety refresher-training, and the three soon realized the dangers of working out-

side the safety net without proper equipment and permission. Also, the OOD's lecture emphasized the potentially deadly consequences of falling to the pier—all because they didn't want to take the extra time to follow safety procedures. Luckily, no one was injured in this situation.

Sailors must follow OPNAV-INST. 5100.19D (with change one), *NAVOSH Program Manual for Forces Afloat*, and existing ship's instructions, when working aloft or over the side. Instructions clearly spell out the procedures, from which no one should deviate, even to save time.

In this situation, incorporating operational risk management into the Sailors' planning would have kept them from not securing themselves with safety harnesses and from risking a fall overboard. With ORM they would have: identified the hazard, assessed the hazard, made risk decisions, implemented controls, and supervised their task for change and effectiveness of the controls.

They should not have put themselves in this potentially life-threatening situation just to save a couple of minutes. Had the Sailor inside the safety net lost his grip, we could have lost a shipmate that day. That certainly isn't worth a life! Taking procedural shortcuts also sets the wrong example for younger Sailors. When they see a senior petty officer breaking safety rules, they might think it's OK if they can save time. They might get away with it once, but who is to say someone else will be as lucky?

Do the right thing: Get permission, and follow procedures! Your and your shipmates' lives depend on it! ☸

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